



Tips for a Healthy School Year

1. Getting Enough ZZZs

By far, the most important school health issue for most kids is getting enough sleep -about 10 to 11 hours a night for elementary school-age children. That sounds simple, but the trouble is, it's not always easy to make your child's sleep patterns mesh with his new school schedule. But to make sure your child can make it through the day without dozing at his desk, night-owl families need to start gradually shifting their schedules a few weeks before school starts.

Don't be surprised if your child comes home from school exhausted, especially in the first few weeks, says Greg Prazar, M.D., a pediatrician in Exeter, NH. "It's a huge adjustment for children," he says. "Lots of kids will need a nap after school to help them revive." If your child doesn't want to sleep, settle for 30 to 45 minutes of quiet time --with no television.



2. Lunchtime!

You may be planning healthy, well-balanced lunches to pack in your child's shiny new *Pokemon* lunchbox. Just don't be surprised if those turkey sandwiches and carrot sticks come back untouched. Eating in new surroundings and under tight time constraints can make some children's appetites evaporate.

Don't worry too much if your child only nibbles on lunch at school, Dr. Prazar says. Instead, focus on providing a protein-filled breakfast. "It doesn't matter what it is, as long as it has some protein. It makes a real difference in your child's energy level." With a little bit of fat and fiber from complex carbohydrates, your child will be ready to start the day. You should also take time to eat breakfast with your children, Dr. Prazar adds. "I know it's tough, but parents are the most important role models. Why would your kid eat breakfast if you don't?"

It's a good idea to lay down some nutrition rules before your child heads into the lunchroom. Otherwise, he may end up trading his healthy lunch for a short stack of Twinkies. "Parents ought to know what their kids are eating at school --so ask them," says Dr. Cimino

3. Bathroom Break

Adjusting to classroom life can be overwhelming for a child who's a little embarrassed about asking to go to the bathroom, and there's nothing more humiliating than an "accident" at school. To help your child avoid any problems, have a talk ahead of time about school bathroom rules-taking breaks as scheduled, and raising your hand for permission to leave the room.

4. Stay Safe

When a child starts school, it's often the first time he's out from under your watchful eye for any length of time. So it's important to review basic safety rules. If your child will be walking to school, go over the route together ahead of time to check out possible hazards, such as busy streets. Don't let a young child walk to school alone, and don't expect a slightly older brother or sister to provide adequate safety supervision, Dr. Schiff says. "There are just too many distractions for 7-, 8-, and 9-year-olds," he adds. "Their ability to take responsibility is limited."



To protect your child from strangers, avoid writing her name on the outside of her backpack or jacket. However, Prazar warns against overstating the risks of child-directed crime, so you don't make your child too scared. "Some parents obsess about it," he says. "Talk about it with your child once at the beginning of every year, and that should do it."



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5. Teens at the wheel

A related highway traffic safety issue is teen driving. There's no way around it: teens want to drive; it goes with the territory. It's natural to be anxious-even terror stricken to even think about your teenager driving a 1-ton-plus vehicle. Try to quell your alarm and remember that experience behind the wheel has a profound effect on reducing car accidents. If you have a new teenage driver in your family, ask him or her to drive as often as possible (with a licensed adult drive in the car, of course). Don't let your teenager take the road without an adult in the car until he or she has adequately and repeatedly demonstrated competence, courtesy, and safe driving.

6. Teenage Drinking

It has been reported that an average of 25.6% of high school students have drunk alcohol for the first time before age 13. In fact, the age at which high school students start to drink is getting younger and younger.

Think carefully about where you store your alcohol. If it is out of sight, it will pose less of a temptation. Exercise responsible drinking related behavior that will have a positive influence on the way your child approaches drinking. Most important of all: talk to your kids seriously and repeatedly about the dangers of underage drinking.

7. Oh what a web

We've all heard about the dangers posed by the internet- especially to children. It's important to discuss rules about computer use often with your children. And remember, there's absolutely nothing wrong with checking to see which Websites our kids visit in your absence. In Fact, it's absolutely right! Finally, ask yourself if your child really needs access to the internet 100% of the time. If the answer is "no" then you can limit their access to when you are at home so you'll be able to see yourself what they're up to.



8. Enjoy a family meal daily

Eating together every day helps establish a pleasant routine that your child will remember for years to come. Importantly, it also creates a natural environment for conversation and sharing.



9. Three little words

"My prescription for making this school year happy, healthy, and fruitful, is to say "I love you" to your kids at least once daily. That simple little phrase packs a lot of power."



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Sources: <http://www.feinberg.northwestern.edu>
Elizabeth Austin, of Parenting.com